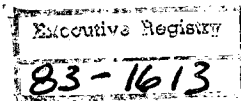


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Central Intelligence Agency  
Washington, D.C. 20505

22 March 1983

Executive Director



NOTE FOR: Fred Demech  
Deputy Executive Director, PFIAB

FROM: Executive Assistant/Executive  
Director

After further research, here is  
another article which Bob Gates wrote.  
Let me know if this is not the one  
you are looking for.

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*Through a glass darkly*

## THE PREDICTION OF SOVIET INTENTIONS

Robert M. Gates

The record of U.S. intelligence in anticipating Soviet tactical and intermediate-range intentions, understanding them, and putting them in proper perspective is not particularly distinguished. We were unable (except, of course, for the then DCI) to predict the Soviet intention to put missiles into Cuba until we saw the photographs of them already there. We failed to anticipate the construction of the Berlin Wall, the ouster of Khrushchev, the timing of the invasion of Czechoslovakia, and other events of importance.

More significantly, we often have failed to understand—or at least have not conveyed to the policy maker—the larger meaning of major Soviet initiatives, and to give proper perspective to Soviet actions. We were much too tardy, for example, in coming to realize the seriousness of differences between China and the USSR, and the effect of these differences—particularly in the mid-1950's—on Soviet policy. Similarly, we were slow to recognize the importance and scope of the Soviet “peace program” in the late 1960's, even after its formal approval by the 24th Party Congress.

The conclusion is inescapable that—while intelligence assessments of Soviet military and economic capabilities have been remarkably accurate—treatment of Soviet political intentions and decisions has not measured up.

### *Why We Have Done Poorly*

Our failure to anticipate or even interpret these and other developments better should come as no surprise. It derives in no small way from the difficulty inherent in trying to predict how political leaders perceive situations, and how they will react in given set of circumstances. It is a very difficult task in a free society; it is that much harder in a closed one, where little if anything is known of the personal lives and psyches of individual leaders, or of internal battles at the top.

The Soviet Union is such a society. It has no free press to bare state secrets or personal rivalries, to expose options under consideration by the leadership, or any of the other juicy tidbits familiar to the American newspaper reader. Except for occasional glimpses in the press of internal institutional disputes, discussion of state policy and intentions is carried on in secret—and there are few leaks. Moreover, instead of a single decision maker, the Soviet system has a 15-man Politburo and a Central Committee of several hundred members, in both of which constantly shifting balances can make or undo any plan or intention.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge is analyzing correctly the Soviets' perception of problems and opportunities, both foreign and domestic. There is a wide cultural gap between a college-educated analyst in the West and the Soviet leadership. As Robert Conquest has stated, “the Soviet leaders are not to be treated as though their motives and conceptions were in our sense natural and rational. The particular leadership now in control in Russia derives from a tradition which is alien in both aim and method to our own.” Not only are they

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